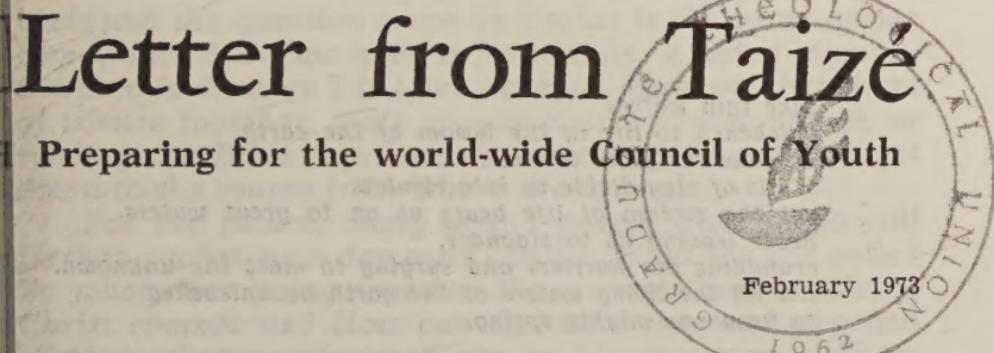


SEP 25 1973



# Letter from Taizé

## Preparing for the world-wide Council of Youth

« Struggle and contemplation ». Recently a young trade unionist from Italy was saying to me that the claims of the Christian's political commitment are always lived out between these two poles.

In his searching, even when it is filled by the silence of God, the Christian foresees this essential reality : the struggle for mankind finds its source in another struggle, inscribed in the innermost recesses of his person, at that unique point where no one resembles anyone else.

Struggle and contemplation : looking toward Easter, this is what is striking in this time of summing up all the intuitions of young people.

On the evening of Easter Day this year, about fifteen months before its opening, we shall be able to announce the first main lines around which the Council of Youth will be built up.

Roger, your brother

*Like rain waters  
quickened to life in the bosom of the earth  
we take our place in time.  
Walls of clay divide us into rivulets  
yet the stream of life bears us on to great waters,  
never leaving us to stagnate,  
crumbling our barriers and surging to meet the unknown.  
Let all the living waters of the earth be unleashed  
to form one mighty spring.*

At the present time, in the preparation for the Council of Youth, we are expecting to learn from one another how to become men of communion : men and women who go forward boldly to explore new valleys beyond the mountains, but who come back again to call all those with whom they have a common solidarity to a new adventure.

We often wonder how to avoid « struggle and contemplation » becoming a new dualism that tears us apart. How rather can we make of it a unity, a oneness that propels us toward mankind ? How can we learn to re-unite constantly the efforts of everyone for Christ and for mankind ? How can we unite the energies of as many people as possible in waging war on the rising tide of capitalization of money by those who govern or by private individuals.

Through Christ, we continue to work and to hope. Through him, contemplation is truly given us, even in the midst of strife — like the man born blind who now sees because of Christ's love, or like the owl whose sight can pierce the shades of night...

*(From a discussion with a group of Italian workers)*

**Meditation for our journey... Always too short for each day it must be given new life : ..**

It becomes clear very quickly that a cell needs a solid basis and the question crops up : what is the heart of our communion ? Do we have a foundation, a living support, a source to draw on ? It often becomes apparent that times of silence together, quite spontaneous personal prayer, or reading the Bible together, are necessary in order to get down to the source from where life springs.

For the future, many young people want to go still farther : what new demands can be found for the cells ? To what does living together the common source who is Christ commit us ? How can we make the next step and involve other people, each one in his own way ? Where does this communion, still hidden, lead us ?

The reply must come to birth in our society that is marked by the lure of gain and possession, by the assertion of self, the will to dominate, and the ever growing incitement to buying and consuming. The reply must come out of a Church whose prejudices and the weight of whose wealth impede her from making clear-cut decisions and living her vocation to the full.

These are questions which must be faced urgently : How to make it possible for those who are non-productive to find their proper place in a balanced society ?

How can we free ourselves of the yoke of activism and productivity ?

Confronted with the law of necessity, how can we live as « outlaws » and live the festival through which man is fulfilled ?

How to maintain one's creative originality in a society where everything is « ready-made » ?

Concrete solutions are being found : sharing with other people — children, old people, strangers, those who are abandoned. Commitment for the Church, where patience and daring are in balance. Involvement in education, the university, political parties, with groups of immigrant workers...

(Klaus, after a visit to cells in Germany)

**We are once again pilgrims on the road to Emmaus.**

If one asks what are the main concerns of a cell, several points come up : breaking down the barriers of selfishness, the need to pray with other people, sharing of our life in brotherhood, searching for the spark that sets one off in the service of others...

Frequently the question arises : how can we reconcile the life together of the cell and the outreach to receive other people ? After a time one begins to discover that being open to everyone who comes along disturbs the life within the cell. Then the fear : are we beginning to close ourselves up in a kind of ghetto ?

But at this point, a number of groups have made the discovery : « We have become aware that one way of living poverty is accepting one's limits. If the aim of our cell is to make ourselves available for a commitment that has prayer as its common source, then we must be coherent. Our life as a group is not a privilege ; it is a necessity for us. Should we therefore limit our outreach for a time ? We have to be realistic about this, in all simplicity ! »

« What can we do concretely ? » This is the inevitable question that always comes up until people have grasped the fact that preparing for the Council of Youth means first and foremost integrating and expressing the « Joyful News » in one's daily life.

From then on, the question is no longer « what activity should we undertake ? », but « how can we live differently ? » And so the cell comes quite naturally to asking themselves how — as a group — to be a « sign that prepares the way » for that society and that Church about which we dream, without privileges and frontiers, without selfishness and the search for power. How can we be this kind of sign now : struggling with all our energy, based on a clear analysis, joining with others, in organised ways (trade union, student organisations, on the professional level, political party) so that the situation may change ?

*(Margarita, after visits to cells in Belgium and France)*

**Our heads that were bowed, roused as we meet  
the Stranger who draws near and comes with us**

Vinde de novo, Senhor,  
nascer nesta terra pobre  
neste chão só de miséria  
onde a Verdade não chove.

Vinde acender as estrelas  
que o egoísmo apagou  
vinde semear a esperança  
nos campos onde secou.

Vinde vencer os soberbos  
em eus tronos instalados  
e devolver aos que sofrem  
o valor do seu trabalho.

Vinde como luz de aurora  
depois da noite tão longa  
iluminar as estradas  
onde os homens se ignoram.

Vinde juntar os irmãos  
em torno à mesma fogueira  
vinde rasgar novas v'redas  
ao sangue das nossas veias.

Vinde de novo, Senhor,  
nascer nesta terra pobre  
neste chão só de miséria  
onde a Verdade não chove.

*(Pedro, from Portugal)*

Come back again, O Lord, to be born in this wretched world, In these barren fields where truth does not rain. / Come to lighten the stars, that selfishness has dimmed, Come to sow hope, in the fields where it has withered. / Come to put down the mighty, set on their thrones, Give to those who toil compensation for their labor. / Come as the first rays of dawn, after a night so long, Lighten the paths, where men do not know one another. / Come to unite us as brothers, around a common fire, Come to set out new paths, in the blood of our veins. / Come back again, O Lord, to be born in this wretched world, In these barren fields where truth does not rain.

**As evening comes, we strain to make out his face  
while he talks to us, to our hearts.**

We spent our time visiting both workers on the land and in industry and with students in the cities. What contrasts and what a gulf exist between these two worlds.

The rural communities in the interior of Brazil, despite a religiosity that I sometimes had difficulty in understanding, moved me very much by their deep faith, so central to their lives. This is no « opium-type » faith of fatalism and superstition, though obviously that does exist, but a faith for which the Gospel is an open book at the heart of their daily life. Like the man who had more land than his neighbour. So he has given his neighbour one of his fields and goes to help him cultivate it. Or like the woman who has assumed responsibility for the child of a neighbour who is even poorer than herself. Or again, like the inhabitants of a village who split into two groups on Sundays and go off to celebrate the liturgy of the Word with a community that has no road, an hour's walk through the mountains. Like the multitude of little groups, centres of reflexion on the life of their village, or their section of the city, who meet together to pray from the Gospel and inject a liberating force into their community that commits them decisively in the struggle for mankind.

As the seasons are not the same at any one time in different countries, so, in the life of the Church, are not the Southern Continents already experiencing the springtime which we are hoping for ?

*(Claire, in Brazil)*

**In interpreting the Book of Life, he takes our broken hopes and kindles them into fire.**

One of the problems for young Americans is their isolation. Many of those whom we met do not know anyone who is not white and American.

For some who took part in a meeting we held in Quebec, finding themselves as a minority in an almost exclusively French-speaking environment was an important discovery.

The words « poverty » and « oppression » have practically no meaning for many young people. The awareness of the American « success » is great. In New York, somebody told us : « We have all grown up with the certainty of our power and we have the impression of being responsible for the whole world... the preparation for the Council of Youth is based on accepting your own weakness and your need for other people. That is a very difficult thing for an American to accept. » He was wondering how to give up this supremacy, without letting himself be crushed by guilt complexes, and without refusing his responsibility.

Man is victim of man, victim of « progress ». In Canada, we met a group of young people who were preparing a series of seminars whose general title was « The death of progress ». In the United States, we met many young people involved in different movements for peace and justice. They all have the same ideal of the liberation of man and they know very well that the alienation imposed by the United States on other countries and on the Chicano, Indian, Black, Porto-Rican and other minorities is directly linked to the alienation caused by the consumer society. In this affluent society, where the key word is « progress », sustained by money, fear and danger are everywhere in the big cities and many people have to struggle to survive.

(Benedicte and Mildrède in North America)

**The way becomes lighter as, drawing the embers together, we learn to fan the flame.**

We are very often astonished by the ease with which young Europeans talk about the Third World. When they hear that we are South Americans, out come the questions — and often judgments with them — on development, underdevelopment, liberation, revolution, aid, cooperation....

We listen to them, and then comes the moment for us to ask : « But here, in the midst of riches and abundance, are there no problems, no injustice ? »

Within myself, I wonder : « Why do they talk so much about the Third World ? Do they believe that this makes them revolutionaries ? »

Then we ask : « You are talking about aid, but what kind of aid are you going to give us ? »

How can people understand that up to now this « aid » — often given with good intentions — has been taken over by the premeditated and calculated action of imperialism and has been used for the domination of our peoples ?

Sometimes our aggressiveness surprises people, but this is a problem that touches us deeply, for we are living it.

We wish to live something that is universal, the preparation for the world-wide Council of Youth. We wish to live the Church. We wish to give our lives so that man be no longer victim of man.

We must be aware of the great problem in the world : the exploitation, ever more apparent, of the poor countries by the rich. But how not to become alienated with this problem ? What can we do to avoid the Third World being reduced to just one more object in the consumer society ?

*(Nestor and Olga, from Argentina)*

**If we invite him this evening, he will sit down and together we shall share the meal.**

## After Easter,

the next international meetings at Taizé :

Saturday 28 April - Tuesday 1 May ;

Ascension (30 May - 3 June) ;

Pentecost (9 - 11 June).

Some things cannot be kept to oneself.

I hesitated a long time before writing this letter, for it represents perhaps what is deepest within me and dearest to me. Yet I understand that I must communicate my joy and my hope to all of you in Christ.

This communion is very hard for me and this interior quest suddenly seems practically impossible. How can I express here all the « folly » and all the depth of this revelation of love and peace ? I am afraid that even by trying to write it down, the interior vision will disappear. There is no such thing as a letter you can send to God.

Therefore it is to you that I am sending this message, to all you who are struggling in Christ throughout the world to bring about the triumph of justice :

« Say that there is no greater joy than to know that you are loved by God, and to be able to love him in return... »

(Letter signed : « A new Christian »)

And then all those who no longer believed will see and the hour of Recognition will come.

Here things are the same as always, with trade union hassles and strikes to improve the situation of the « mezzogiorno ». But each day the trains are full of emigrants, and nothing is being done about this problem.

We have noticed that in our group a greater awareness of socio-political problems is evolving. We also continue faithfully our Bible sharing and, together, search for our answers to the five questions on the Council of Youth.

Right now I am personally involved in « school-mastering » : I tutor young people who haven't even finished their primary education. We often hear the phrase « the school is open to all »... but there are an incredible number of illiterates, especially in Calabria, most of them sons of peasants and shepherds. I find it very easy to understand them, for we come from the same family — my father, too, is a shepherd. And I feel very close to them, especially when I think of how fortunate I was to be able to continue my studies.

Above all I most certainly do not want to teach them a bunch of trivia. Rather, for me the essential is to create an atmosphere where the spirit of brotherly love can blossom... to become involved together in a struggle that enables us to move beyond our crippling material poverty. I am involved in yet other ways, but this year it is important for me to strive to live this particular commitment more deeply.

Pray for all of us, so that, by the grace of the Lord, we may be given the courage to face up to and solve these problems. Pray, above all, that, even in the midst of suffering, our faith may be grounded in Him.

*(Giuseppe, from Calabria)*

**He will break the bread of tears at the table of the poor and each will receive manna to his fill.**

I have just received a letter from La Paz which tells of the 60 % devaluation and the famine that has started in the « villas ». There is a shortage of flour and the police are searching out hidden reserves. There is repression of demonstrations in the « barrios », where people have been killed and wounded...

This news was sent to me by Bolivian friends who spend six days out of seven in the « campo », teaching agricultural techniques. They are deeply committed to the liberation of their people, and they want their action to be based, not merely on a reflexion on the situation in Bolivia, but on a reflexion on these situations in communion with the thinking of other young people elsewhere in the world.

For myself, I believe that it is in the measure that I tackle the problems of society here in Belgium that I contribute to the changing of men's mentalities...

But where do we find the strength not to give up in the face of this bourgeois society, comfortable and right-thinking as it is, and to which we ourselves belong ? How to be ourselves in the midst of this, without just shocking people ? How do we avoid just dropping out, through fear of losing our ideas and our courage ?

In Gent, I have been struck by the sign-boards on the cafés that say « Closed to foreigners », « Closed to North Africans », in just the same way as you might find a sign saying « Beware of the dog ! » We want therefore to tackle the problem of the integration of foreign workers who in Gent number around 3000...

(A young man who has just spent two years working in Bolivia)

**We shall return to Jerusalem to proclaim aloud what he has whispered in our ear.**

Perhaps the only way to live the « Joyful News » in India is to participate in the development of the country. Cells, scattered across the country and always completely committed to a concrete project for the liberation of man, could become catalysts which unleash a process of conscientization and liberation. The preparation of the Council of Youth in India must be discreet and long term. Even more so than in other countries, it must be an interior adventure, taking part in the hidden, underground life of the Church... when things are seen in this way, tiny rays of light begin to shine for me in my country.

An Indian friend who worked with me for years in the same laboratory in Bombay has left the laboratory to give himself entirely to a rural education project in the center of India ; a girl who lived for two years in a hut with untouchables who are particularly exploited in South India took part, sometimes at the risk of her life, in action against the power of the land owners...

As I travel across the world, living in the midst of highly diverse cultures, I share so completely in this long-time dream of humanity : a world without frontiers where men will be brothers. This unity, so ardently sought after and lived is making our differences of race and cultures break apart. Inwardly the quest for unity becomes the search for God and for Christ within history, in mankind and society. The Council of Youth is part of the great movement of men towards their own liberation. With hesitant steps, always in the night, following a tiny ray of light, we are moving from death to life.

*(Moïz, astro physicist from India)*

**And no doubt we shall find brothers there who will reply : « We too have met him ».**

When you speak about Africa, you cannot help remembering what colonization has been.

How can we create new relations that can set history right : new relations that can be signs which prepare the way for a society converted to reciprocity ?

The question is to bring youth into such a revision of history, in the North just as well as in the South, and to make them aware of their share of human responsibility in it. Yet above all, no one must be burdened with guilt and children must not pay for the faults of their fathers.

There are even more whites in Africa today than during the colonial period. They come as technicians and teachers starting out on their careers, and once they have made a name for themselves, they leave for good.

How can you have confidence, and get attached to someone who is just a passing guest and whose roots are elsewhere ?

Furthermore, of those who choose to spend their life in Africa, there are very few who do so other than as masters in the European quarters. Yet living among the people is the one and only way of getting to know them and being accepted by them.

No communion is possible until we get to the point of becoming aware of the fact that we all live under the same roof and that the fire that threatens one side of the house will not spare those who live on the other side. For Africa, Europe cannot just wash its hands ; the problems that occur there, in spite of all the defenses we may set up to keep them out, will have repercussions here too sooner or later — and vice versa.

(Joseph, from Zaire)

**For we know : the mercy of God has come to visit the land of the living !**

In New Zealand, differences in wages are relatively small. This material equality has been brought about mainly by a graduated tax system for large incomes. Nearly everybody has his own house, with garden, and there are very few apartments, even in the cities. I am writing this letter in the house where I am staying. The owner is a garage mechanic. His house is equipped with all the labor-saving appliances, hot water; he has an automobile and his children are at high school.

Although New Zealand has so many things that other countries do not have, there seems to be almost a kind of lassitude. The younger generation has more or less everything that young people elsewhere are struggling for (social justice, etc.) and yet they appear to be looking for a situation that would make demands of them and involve a real commitment.

We found the feeling of boredom and frustration even more pronounced among some of the young we met previously in Australia. So many people kept asking us, « But what can we do? »» Throughout our visit to Australia, perhaps the two points which seemed to come out most strongly were isolation and the difficulties of achieving integration between the different sections of the population.

Many people feel isolated, not merely in regards to other countries, but also between the major centers of population in Australia itself. Practically, how can we create a real communion between people in spite of their being separated by enormous distances? The question of integration takes different forms. In Melbourne, we met for example, a group of Greeks who expressed how difficult it was for them to really become part of society. The greatest division concerns of course the Aborigines, who seem completely apart from all the others, the majority of them living in reserves. Only recently, some of them set up « embassies » to bring attention to their plight.

There is still time to send us your thoughts on the five questions of Easter 1972.

## Registration form : EASTER 1973

Return to :

« YOUTH MEETINGS », F - 71460 Taizé-Community

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First Name :

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(with zip-code and country)

Profession : ..... year of birth : .....

Will take part in the meeting:

Thursday 19 April to Monday 23 April (noon)

Saturday 21 April to Monday 23 April (noon).

Already took part in a meeting at Taizé :

yes-no

Will bring own tent, with .... free places.

yes-no

Will be part of the reception team arriving 16 April.

yes-no

Can be in discussion groups speaking french — italian — german — english — spanish — portuguese — or .....

Can help with simultaneous translation from ..... into .....

Please send .... more registration forms.

## EASTER 1973 AT TAIZÉ

This Easter, we shall begin the last year of preparation for the Worldwide Council of Youth. Our meeting will be essentially a celebration of the Resurrection.

There will be two meetings, and to ensure that these days be as intense as possible both of them will be short :

from Thursday 19 April to Monday 23 April (noon) ;  
from Saturday 21 April to Monday 23 April (noon) ..

*Age* : from 18 to 29.

*Cost* : Left to the discretion of each person (suggested contribution is 9 francs per day = 2 US Dollars, 75 p U.K.). In the spirit of communion, those who can afford it give more to share with those who come from far away or who cannot pay as much.

*Accommodation* : In individual and large dormitory tents. Bring your blankets, sleeping bags, air mattresses and, if possible, your own tents.

*Some places will be designated as silent areas for those who wish to be quiet.*

*Reception team* : All those who would like to be part of the reception team are asked to write us and arrive at Taizé Monday afternoon, the 16 April. This team will be in charge of all the practical preparation for the meetings.

*Groups* : Your group, from the beginning, will be encouraged to split up so that each and every one can be integrated with all others present. Therefore, each member of the group is asked to send a separate registration form.

To facilitate the work of the reception team it is necessary to register by means of the accompanying registration form. We will be glad to send more forms if needed. We shall note your registration ; do not expect us to confirm.

Letter N° 13

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